

The impact of the 'Blue Whale' game in the rates of suicide: Short psychological analysis of the phenomenon

International Journal of
Social Psychiatry
1–2

© The Author(s) 2017

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0020764017732595

journals.sagepub.com/home/isp



**Danilo Ferreira de Sousa^{1,3}, João de Deus Quirino Filho¹,
Rita de Cassia Pires Bezerra Cavalcanti¹,
Alciono Bezerra dos Santos³ and Modesto Leite Rolim Neto^{1,2}**

Dear Editor,

The phenomenon of suicide has never had such a great repercussion since World War II. Recently, a virtual game called the 'Blue Whale' has been a subject of discussion in social networks and investigation by the police. The game proposes 50 challenges ranging from self-mutilation to suicide. Due to the fact that the majority of adolescents spend a lot of time in social networks, it is considered a population more susceptible, whether related to social characteristics or to a process of formation of the psychological profile (Clicrbs, 2017; Terra, 2017a).

It appears that the game began in Russia in 2015, when a 15-year-old committed suicide by firing himself from the top of a building. Another case was recorded when a 14-year-old girl shot herself in front of a train. About 130 suicides were indicated as influenced by the game. Countries such as England, France and Romania are on alert for cases (Terra, 2017a).

Information was searched in widely circulated newspapers such as *iheartintelligence*, *smash*, *G1* from Globo, *clicrbs*, *indy100*, *Terra*, *UOL* and *Folha de São Paulo* using the keywords 'Baleia Azul' and 'suicídio' and 'Blue Whale' and 'suicide' for international newspapers with subsequent concatenation of ideas and an estimative analysis of the facts.

The game works through instructions given by a mentor who induces children and adolescents to perform 50 tasks and the last one is to take their own life. The game starts with self-mutilations to write acronyms like 'F57' or draw a whale in the arm with a razor. Whenever a curator or teacher requests this type of assignment, the participant is requested to send photos to prove the accomplishment of the task (Iheartintelligence, 2017; Smash, 2017).

Afterwards the victim is asked to make dangerous challenges such as climbing on the roof, cutting the lip, among others. The victim is also asked to watch horror movies and listen to psychedelic songs, all indicated by the mentor. The person is then instructed to wake up at 4:20 in the morning and successively perform the tasks, such as hanging on the roof (G1 Globo, 2017; Smash, 2017).

Participants are asked to write '#i_am_whale' on the status of a social network initially called 'Vkontakte',

where the game supposedly started in 2015 and currently is on the social network Facebook. Other tasks, according to the data available, vary according to the profile of each victim. The challenge of number 50 is to take one's life on a day determined by the mentor (Epocanegócios, 2017; Indy100, 2017). In the region of Vila Rica in Mato Grosso, Brazil, a 16-year-old girl committed suicide after drowning in a pond. A 13-year-old boy was hanged on the south coast of the state capital, and this suicide case was also linked to the game (Epocanegócios, 2017).

There are also cases in Minas Gerais, Brazil, being investigated and, at least, four attempts in Rio de Janeiro. One fact that also raised the discussion around suicide was the popularization of the series 13 Reasons Why, which lists 13 reasons that made a teenager commit suicide. Due to the media's great repercussions on the fact, the mentors began to induce a suicide before the 50th mission. However, the killings keep happening. The deaths of 15-year-old Yulia Konstantinova and 16-year-old Veronika Volkova are being investigated by state investigators in Krasnoyarsk, a city east of Moscow (Indy100, 2017).

Considering that 5.8% of the Brazilian population suffers from depression (Terra, 2017b), a strong risk factor for suicide, a phenomenon such as the 'Blue Whale' game is a major predisposing factor for the increase in suicide rates. In this perspective, some reflections and hypotheses can be formulated.

In Brazil, two cases are practically confirmed as related to the 'Blue Whale' game. If only one mentor persuades a child each day to participate in the game, in one month we will have approximately 30 victims. If each of these people convinced two people to participate in the game and

¹Postgraduate Program in Health Sciences, ABC Faculty of Medicine, São Paulo, Brazil

²Faculty of Medicine, Federal University of Cariri (UFCA), Ceará, Brazil

³Faculty of Juazeiro do Norte (FJN), Ceará, Brazil

Corresponding author:

Modesto Leite Rolim Neto, Faculty of Medicine, Federal University of Cariri (UFCA), 284, Divine Savior Street, Downtown, Barbalha, Ceará 63180000, Brazil.

Email: modestorolim@yahoo.com.br

these two people each convinced only two more, during 50 days of game, it would be 210 victims, which would reach more than 2,500 victims in one year. If only 5% finish the game, there would be more than 120 deaths in just one year.

Although not confirmed, in Russia there were 130 deaths possibly related to the game, which considering the population of Russia of more than 146 million people, this number represents more than 8 deaths for every 10 million inhabitants, which for a social network game is quite significant. In a country like Brazil, with more than 200 million people, this would generate a total of 180 similar cases, not to mention the large information and curiosity around this game in the current scenario, which would increase the number of cases over 0.01% in a year.

In a country such as Brazil, with the population of about 60 million young people, if we keep the same proportions of deaths registered until this moment, a total of more than 53 suicides only among children and adolescents can be registered in a period of 1 year due to the 'Blue Whale'.

Considering the period of 2 years, an incidence of 0.08 for every 100 million inhabitants in a country with about 200 million people and a prevalence of the game of 0.01, the suicide rate that would be avoided with prevention measures would be approximately 1,599 people. Using the same data, it would prevent 479 deaths among children and adolescents. These analyses already consider a possible incidental explosion of the phenomenon of suicide associated with the game.

The 'Blue Whale' game is being a risk and vulnerability factor, mainly among children and young people, who already have other associated risk factors and a wide connection in social networks. A preventive and proactive perspective of the game and monitoring young people by the school and their parents are essential factors for a decrease in these indices.

Acknowledgements

The study was supported by Scientific Writing Lab, Medicine School – Federal University of Cariri – UFCA. Five independent researchers (DFS and JDQF and MLRN and RCPBC and ABS) performed a three-step bibliographic search. Any discrepancies between the five reviewers who, blinded with each other,

examined the studies for possible inclusion were resolved by the literature survey of queries the eligible studies.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was funded by Suicidology-Federal University of Ceará – UFC/National Council for Scientific and Technological Development-CNPq – body linked to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation to encourage research in Brazil.

References

- Clicrbs. (2017). *Blue Whale: Experts discuss suicide among children and adolescents*. Retrieved from <http://wp.clicrbs.com.br/fraldacheia/?s=baleia+azul+e+suic%C3%ADdio&topo=52%2C1%2C1%2C%2C171%2C171>
- Epocanegócios. (2017). *Blue Whale, the suicidal game that worries Brazil and the world*. Retrieved from <http://epocanegocios.globo.com/Mundo/noticia/2017/04/baleia-azul-o-jogo-suicida-que-preocupa-o-brasil-e-o-mundo.html>
- G1 Globo. (2017). *Understand the 'Blue Whale Game' and the risks involved*. Retrieved from <http://g1.globo.com/educacao/blog/andrea-ramal/post/entenda-o-jogo-da-baleia-azul-e-os-riscos-envolvidos.html>
- Iheartintelligence. (2017). *Here's how the 'blue whale' suicide game is killing teens on social media*. Retrieved from <http://iheartintelligence.com/2017/02/22/blue-whale-suicide-game-social-media>
- Indy100. (2017). *A social media 'game' called 'Blue Whale' may be connected to a spate of suicides in Russia*. Retrieved from <https://www.indy100.com/article/suicide-russia-online-social-media-game-danger-youth-blue-whale-7603581>
- Smash. (2017). *'Blue whale' social media game is linked to over 139 Russian teens committing suicide*. Retrieved from <http://www.smash.com/russian-teens-are-committing-suicide-in-blue-whale-social-media-game/>
- Terra. (2017a). *Blue Wlahe, the suicidal game that worries Brazil and the world*. Retrieved from <https://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/baleia-azul-o-jogo-suicida-que-preocupa-o-brasil-e-o-mundo,68a0cd68ebc84d9745ed7b85dd78950a0snjdwtv.html>
- Terra. (2017b) *Blue Whale 'is just the trigger': Felipe Neto's viral appeal about the real causes of suicide*. Retrieved from <https://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/baleia-azul-e-so-o-gatilho-o-apelo-viral-de-felipe-neto-sobre-as-reais-causas-do-suicidio,256c32e3b97ca99c8762133c8088a8d8q8hqwtc.html>